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## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DRINK

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The attentive reader of Homer is keenly impressed with the deep religiousness of the author and the people whom he describes. He represents gods and men as intimately associated in a common life. The divine beings watch the earth inhabitants with great solicitude, keeping near them to bless or to punish. What we call natural phenomena, plastic to the touch of celestial wills, were constantly shaped to foster or injure the life of man. The gods had favorites whom they protected, while there were others whom they chastised.

On the other hand, all human beings felt the immediate presence of the gods. They could say with a conviction seldom found today: In them we live, move, and have our being. The consciousness of divine protection and guidance, with impending punishment of disobedience, was clear and constant. In it were found the sanctions of morality, the sources of heroism, the springs of daily conduct.

This ancient belief in the close association of gods and men in a common life found, however, expression in many actions which seem to us both irrational and irreligious. Of these, the most foreign to modern ideas was the elaborate system of sacrifice. Slaughtered animals were burned with painstaking ceremonials upon innumerable altars, which were regarded as the most sacred meeting places between man and his god. Then the divine presence was most immediate and awful. Oaths there uttered and contracts there made were supremely binding, having the invisible but powerful deity as witness, who would act as avenger in case of neglect.

These offerings were far more than mere presents to win the favor of a heavenly being, as the subject by gifts seeks to secure the friendship of an earthly despot. Nor were they prompted

solely by the sense of sin, in penitent endeavor to secure pardon for wrongdoing. Both these elements were often present; but the chief aim in early times was, in this way, actually to nourish and sustain the very life of God, and so, by reflex action, to enlarge and exalt man's life also, for both gods and men participated in a common existence. The heavenly being really needed the earthly food so presented by his children at the altar, which was in truth a common table where the life of both was enriched. The idea of sustenance was prominent in sacrificial worship.

However foolish or even revolting all this may seem to us, it was a vital conviction to those distant peoples. They were doing their best, for this was their conception of the universe put into action. Here we must note a most important fact, that prominent among their sacrificial offerings was the "libation": the outpouring of various forms of alcoholic liquors. The gods had more ethereal beverages in their heavenly abode, but earthly wines were most acceptable and helpful to them. If the gods needed the flesh and blood of the animals which men ate as food, surely they also needed the wine which makes glad the heart of man. As both heaven and earth were bound up in a common life, and as it was man's duty to sustain the life of his god, what he himself found so helpful, banishing weariness, increasing strength, and giving joy—this man must offer to the deity whom he worshiped.

It is not difficult to see why wine seemed an appropriate gift to God. Judging by appearances—and this was the only way the early man could judge—wine is the supreme life-giver. Its immediate effects are apparently most helpful and delightful: a sense of warmth pervades the body; a feeling of exhilaration takes possession of the whole being, fatigue and weariness being banished; the tongue is loosened and speech becomes rapid; new energies seem to flow through every limb and every sense is apparently quickened; while those who drink feel that they have entered a new world, whose spacious realms they traverse as though walking on air and whose innumerable treasures are their particular property. A feeling of great dignity and exaltation, of new capacity, of increased importance springs up within them. The old world, with its cares, tears, and vexations, vanishes, while all

things become new. Deeds are done without effort, as in dreams. All this is only "apparent," as we fully know today, but it was real to them, and so they called liquor a *stimulant*. We, however, know that it is not a stimulant, but a depressant and paralyzer.

But what to them apparently so blesses human life must be a most precious gift to every celestial being. As it produces experiences which apparently lift men up to the gods, it must be the most god-given of gifts, which man, in turn, with deepest gratitude, must present to his Maker.

About this belief in liquor as a life-giver, operative in the sacrificial system, grew up many other customs.

1. Its use became the medium for the expression of hospitality among men. The primitive mind very naturally argued: If it produces friendship between man and his god, certainly it is the most appropriate means for expressing and cultivating good-will among men. The guest must obviously be given what is best. The greatest distinction that could be bestowed upon him was to present him what was offered to nourish the life of God; what would most increase his own life. Therefore whenever the stranger came, whenever men met and wished to display friendly feelings, the cup was passed. This was a very natural application of their thought about wine: extending to their fellows what also was given to God in worship. The modern habit of "treating" may in this way be easily and clearly traced to its true psychological root.

2. For similar reasons, liquor came to be used in many ceremonial ways. Great undertakings, solemn occasions, and sacred events needed the witnessing presence and approval of some deity. This association of sanctity, insuring divine sanction and human obligation, must be secured by sacrifice. A covenant between men must be sealed by bringing God near through an offering of wine: that which sustains life, human and divine. Hence, liquor was used to solemnize compacts between individuals and tribes, the passing of the cup from lip to lip symbolizing the common obligation. At marriage, birth, and death, the drinking of liquor seemed the proper thing to do, as it was pre-eminently the supreme life-giver. Here is the psychological explanation of the habit of

drinking one's health at banquets; also of the custom of baptizing the bow of the new ship with wine.

3. It was probably later that the specifically hygienic uses of liquor came into prominence. As a "life-giver," it has been universally, and is still commonly, used for medicinal purposes, resort being made to it to cure all diseases, real and imaginary. Whatever the ailment, the patient must be given some "toddy." At the animistic stage of human culture, when every form of sickness was attributed to the invasion of the body or mind by evil spirits, very naturally resort was made to the master spirit residing in liquors, in order to drive out these disease demons. Even the name "spirits" by which alcohol is known carries us back to this ancient state of mind.

Resort was also made to liquor to prepare one to resist cold or heat. Before beginning any great exertion or undertaking any serious enterprise, men felt that they must reinforce themselves by using some kind of drink. All this was, indeed, wise, if liquor is really a life-giver. And undoubtedly, the early sacrificial uses of wine, and its long association with sacred rites as the medium of worship and the food of the gods (consider for a moment in passing how the poets even in recent times have sung its praises—a great misfortune, making it necessary for parents to disinfect such literature before placing it in the hands of their children), did much to inaugurate and sustain these hygienic practices in the use of liquor, which continues long after the psychological conditions out of which they sprang have passed away.

With these considerations in mind, a keen observer will find new interest in sitting in a hotel lobby and watching the stream of men who pass by him into the barroom. Leaving out of account a few inebriates in a diseased condition, *alcoholism*, who ought to be under treatment and restraint, probably a large majority do not care very much for the mere physical taste of liquor, so that mere appetite plays a subordinate part in a majority of cases.

By watching the people as they pass, two main classes may very easily be distinguished.

First, those who drink chiefly for hospitality and fellowship. The use of liquor with them is mainly a means of sociability.

Very frequently this scene is enacted: Two old friends meet and cordially shake hands and begin to talk of old times. Soon a third person is introduced and at once there is sufficient social momentum to cause one of the party to suggest: "Let's take something." So off they go to the bar. And here the social instinct, finding vent in a long-established custom of drinking, conversation flows freely with the liquor and all soon separate with a sense of satisfaction. Mere appetite has here played no important part, while no sinful or vicious intent has been present—simply a common form of sociability, sanctioned by long usage and rooted in ancient beliefs associated with sacrificial worship, though this connection was long since forgotten. The custom survives, chiefly, because of the social warmth which finds expression in it, in which also operates the desire to give a friend something that will nourish his life, in the belief that liquor is a great life-giver—a "superstition," but still active among us.

Second, besides these small social groups which adjourn to the barroom for liquor, there is a succession of less sociable drinkers, most numerous about the middle of the forenoon and the afternoon. These are the men who use liquor because they feel that they need a "bracer"—something, as they say, to steady their nerves, to remove the sense of *goneness* in the stomach, and to put *vim* into their tired muscles. They generally drink alone and quickly, going at once back to their work. If not able to reach a bar, they carry a bottle. Here, too, the motive is generally innocent and the mere pleasure of the palate plays a minor part. They will tell you "that they do not care for the taste of the stuff," but they feel that they cannot get along without it.

Whatever morbid craving may operate here, it is not a normal demand of the body, but the mere tyranny of habit. Like any established routine of life, whether necessary or merely perfunctory, when the periodic moment arrives the demand is felt. For years, at that hour, these men have been in the habit of drinking; and the "habit" (*habeo*—"I hold") asserts itself. The urgency does not so much represent a real need as a superficial routine of life. The body has been accustomed to this "prod" and it looks for it when the hour arrives. Moreover, alcohol belongs to the "habit-

forming" group of drugs, like opium, which tend to weaken the will and produce certain abnormal and vicious demands, which enslave both body and mind.

These drinkers feel sure that they need the "bracer" and that it does them good. But they are under bonds to that old superstition which represents liquor as a life-giver—a belief which descends to us from the ages of sacrificial worship, and which like the bloody animal sacrifice ought to be banished from the face of the earth. What we know is that instead of making the nerves strong and steady, liquor weakens or paralyzes them. Instead of feeding the body like a true food, it merely deadens the sense of hunger, as ether destroys the consciousness of pain without removing its cause. Instead of adding strength to the wearied muscles, it merely makes them forget that they are weary, as a noise in the street diverts attention from the prattle of the child at the knee.

Thus, those who drink because they feel that they need a "bracer" are continually self-deceived. They prod their bodies as the driver whips his horse, but the whip adds no strength to the horse and it is no adequate substitute for oats. Their belief and practice represent a superstition as baseless as the superstition of the African barbarian, who thinks that his sacrifice of a pig really secured his good crop. The line of laborers, who crowd the saloon bar at the close of day, imagine that the drinks rest them and make it possible for them to work easier on the morrow. But their belief is as erroneous and their performance as foolish as the sacrificial offerings described by Homer.

In fact, these modern sacrifices to Bacchus in the saloon are in many ways far worse than the ancient animal sacrifices, because they do an immense amount of injury to the drinker, to his family and friends, to the state, and to his descendants, whereas the sacrificial altars represented little more than a foolish waste of effort and treasure.

Now, the growing intelligence and conscience of the race have long since put a stop to animal sacrifice as a method of influencing providence or nourishing the life of mankind. And surely, it is high time that this associated superstition respecting liquor, that

it is a life-giver, should cease to afflict our race. The foaming cup does more harm than the bloody altar. The drinking of one's health at a banquet is just as much of a superstition (except the fellowship expressed by it) as the offering of a lamb to solemnize a tribal compact. The line of laborers in the saloon at sunset drinking beer represents much more harm than all the Grecian sacrifices on the altars about ancient Troy. The man who drains a whiskey bottle acts more foolishly than the far-off savage who sprinkled the blood of a bullock before his door to keep off the demons of disease.

This view of the drink habit, as closely associated with a foolish and harmful superstition, must be vigorously pressed upon the attention of all classes, but especially upon the rising generation. Men must be made to see that there is no real need of liquor: all these customs belong to barbaric times. There are far better methods of expressing fellowship and sustaining life. The theory of the universe upon which the uses of liquor rest is viciously false. The practices themselves, besides being superstitious, are positively and seriously harmful.

It took many centuries and gigantic efforts to destroy the system of animal sacrifice. The vested rights of priesthoods, the impressive ceremonials enshrined in sacred associations, and the hopes and fears which surrounded altar and temple: all these influences the prophets of spirituality had to fight. Only by the efforts of innumerable martyrs and numberless heroes was the victory for the moral ideal won. But at last the waste of life and treasure, the revolting streams of blood, the low and false views of God, associated with these customs—all these have come to an end.

The hour has struck for a great battle against the twin superstition of drink, which more foolishly misreads the law of God and the need of man; which wastes in treasure every day more than all temple sacrifices cost in a generation; and which presses from the eyes of women and children a stream of tears wider than the rivers of blood flowing from the world's altars, and from human life a wail of anguish louder than the songs of all the temple priesthoods of the earth. And in this present-day battle against



the liquor-superstition, born of the same ignorance that produced animal sacrifice, we have to fight vested interests of mammoth proportions, the venerable associations of ancient customs, and a hundred mistaken notions respecting personal rights and human good.

It is encouraging, however, to note the number of influences irresistibly fighting the liquor-superstition.

1. Medical science is decisive in teaching that even the so-called moderate use of liquor is conducive to disease, producing many specific disorders, aggravating every form of sickness, predisposing to distempers, weakening the body's natural defenses against its enemies, lessening the curative efficacy of medicines, and decreasing the prospects of recovery. These facts are now so well known that alcoholic beverages are less and less used as therapeutic agents. Great hospitals have, in many cases, in the last ten years, cut down their liquor bills to one-fifth, some to one-tenth, of the former amount. Medical science commands: If you want to keep well let drink alone, and if you want the largest chance of recovery when sick, touch it not when well.

2. Insurance experience demonstrates, most clearly and emphatically, that even mild liquor used in so-called moderation is a life-destroyer. Insurance companies have no sentimental interest in human life. To them, a man's life is solely a matter of business investment. Their change of attitude on this subject in the last seventy years has been radical and significant. Two generations ago, the total abstainer was considered a poor risk or refused a policy by many companies. Today he is considered by far the best risk, other things being equal, and many companies take him at a lower rate and give him an annual bonus. All this has come about because experience has shown that the total abstainer has a stronger hold on life, from 15 to 30 per cent greater. Everywhere in the insurance world, the bars are being put up higher and higher, not only against the drunkard, but against the common drinker. Many insurance companies, by their admirable and decisive bulletins, widely circulated, have become very influential in the work of temperance education.

3. The appeal to life along the line of endurance and efficiency

shows that alcohol in any and all amounts is a life-destroyer. This is what the explorers in polar regions tell us from Nansen to Amundsen. All the experiences in every field of athletic contest demonstrate the same impressive fact. Great military and naval commanders give similar testimony: generals like Lord Roberts and admirals like Lord Beresford. The campaigns in India, the Soudan, South Africa tell the same story. So decisive is the evidence that the German Emperor makes urgent pleas for less drinking in his army and navy. Those who employ men where risks are great—notably railway companies—lay down increasingly strict rules respecting temperance. Investigations of the work accomplished by operatives, in mill and factory, have made it clear that the line of efficiency begins low on Monday, as a result of the Saturday night and Sunday drinking (aside from this it ought to be higher), while it rises as the week advances, during the days when there is the least indulgence in liquor.

4. Numerous and decisive physiological and psychological experiments and investigations, carried on especially in the past twenty years, have proved that alcohol is not a life-giver, but a life-destroyer. The researches of the world's greatest scientists all point in one direction. The facts which they present are numerous and conclusive. The most important are now too well known to need repetition here.

Experiments like those on dogs, by Professor Hodge of Clark University, and investigations like those by Dr. Loitinen of the University of Helsingfors respecting infant mortality reveal the terrible degeneracy in offspring due to parental indulgence in drink. The recent commendation of opposite views by Professor Karl Pearson has been shown to be radically defective in logic as well as destitute of truth.

The careful investigations by Professor Kraepelin and many others have made clear two supremely important facts: (1) That alcohol, even in small quantities, permanently slows thought, dulls and deranges perception, weakens the will-power, and perverts the judgment. (2) That the user is woefully deceived, being made to feel that he thinks and acts faster, while in truth just the opposite is the case. The worst thing about the use of liquor is this very

fact that the sense of relief from fatigue and the feeling of increased vigor of mind and body are *false reports*. The discoveries of Overton and Meyer respecting the destructive action of alcohol upon the *lipoids* (the fatty substances sheathing the tissues of the body) help us to understand why liquor deranges the whole intelligence system of the human body, giving rise to the deceptions just noted. If the insulating covering of the power cable be stripped off down the line, so as to cause a leak of electric energy, the indicator in the power-house would show that much power was being used, and the inference would be natural that cars were running rapidly whereas they were actually stalled. In similar fashion the drinker is deceived.

Another crude illustration of what happens is found in the remark of the old sailor who told the young man to stop drinking before the *two* balls hanging across the room looked like *three*. Whereat the young man replied that he himself better stop at once, for he was now seeing *two* where there was only *one*. Just this deception produced by drink accounts for the practice of Australian wool-growers who induced buyers to drink heavily before making their purchases, knowing that in the condition so produced their wools would seem finer. This very deception is at the bottom of the ancient superstition, which still persists, that liquor is a life-giver. An eminent English physician, Dr. Chapple, has strikingly stated the whole case in a few words: The curse of drink continues because it deceives the user and enriches the maker.

In his Norman Kerr Memorial Lecture, given November 11, 1911, Dr. G. Sims Woodhead, professor in the University of Cambridge, gave the results of some original and very delicate experiments upon himself respecting the "Action of Alcohol on Bodily Temperature," which strikingly confirm the statements just made. He equipped himself with apparatus that would give a continuous record of surface and internal temperature (the latter taken through the rectum). He writes: "The alcohol [a very small quantity] was sipped slowly. Almost immediately I experienced a sense of warmth and glow both in the stomach and in the skin, which later became more moist. The face felt a little

flushed. From my general sensation I was satisfied that both external and internal temperatures had risen considerably."

However, after the night's sleep, when he examined the record, what he found was this: While the surface temperature rose for a time, there was later a permanent fall and the internal temperature fell from the start. To quote his own words: "On developing the record given by the internal thermometer I found, however, *that my sensations had misled me completely, and that, instead of a rise, there had been a distinct initial fall.*" The apparent warmth was, on the whole, a deception. The effect of the alcohol was to force blood to the surface where it was cooled, so that while the surplus of blood in the external tissues gave a temporary feeling of warmth, the body as a whole was robbed of heat—a fact which was not reported owing to the deranged condition of the system due to the alcohol.

In these experiments, Professor Woodhead was simply confirming a well-known conclusion of science, that alcohol, instead of permanently warming, really cools the body, and yet, in such a way as to make it harmful even in warm weather. But the point of chief significance, needing special emphasis, is this: the fact that he, a trained scientist, was deceived respecting his own condition. He felt that he was warmer, when in truth his body was losing its heat. Nothing could better illustrate and demonstrate the real effect of alcohol upon the human system: *It deceives the user.* It so deranges the system that the reports given are false. The drinker thinks that he is stronger, warmer, wiser, whereas the exact opposite is the fact. Liquor always lies to the user, making him think that it is a life-giver when it is a life-destroyer. Just here is the root of the ancient superstition which we are considering.

There is another phase of this subject which must be mentioned. It is of very great importance, but it can be given here only slight attention. A serious part of the general effect of alcohol upon brain and mind is that it inhibits or paralyzes the higher faculties, which are the later products of evolution, and therefore more easily influenced. The brain centers associated with our more animal life are older and more hardy, with greater power of resistance. Those associated with our more human qualities, such as

modesty, discretion, and moral feelings, are newer, less resolute, and more susceptible to derangement. As a result, when alcohol is taken into the system, its destructive power is first felt by these higher nerve centers. The restraining influences of good manners and good morals are swept aside or inhibited. And left without these checks and balances, the merely animal impulses come to mastery, so that a man in his cups becomes boastful, obscene, beastly. He does things for which he has to apologize the next day. Intoxication is not increase of life, but putting the reins into the hands of the animal within us. Liquor changes the character by paralyzing the best and highest in us. It puts the real man to sleep. He is not there. This inhibition produced by alcohol is what makes its use so harmful and so dangerous. It tends to strike down all the finer products of culture and civilization. It is more than merely a life-destroyer, for it destroys the higher life and puts the spirit in subjection to the brutish. Therefore, we deal here, not only with a superstition that is false, but with a superstition that is deadly.